



## 2006 Fact Sheet



View of Elephant Tusk peak from the South Rim

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Big Bend National Park was authorized by Congress in 1935 to preserve and protect a representative area of the Chihuahuan Desert along the Rio Grande for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The park includes rich biological and geological diversity, cultural history, recreational resources, and outstanding opportunities for bi-national protection of our shared natural and cultural heritage.

### Overview

#### Park Purpose

Big Bend National Park's purpose is threefold:

- Preserve and protect all natural and national register-eligible cultural resources and values.
- Provide educational opportunities to foster understanding and appreciation of the natural and human history of the region.
- Provide recreational opportunities for diverse groups that are compatible with the protection and appreciation of park resources.

#### Establishment

Established as Texas Canyons State Park in May 1933; name changed to Big Bend State Park, October 1933; authorized by Congress as a National Park in 1935; established as a National Park in 1944.

#### Name

The Big Bend area of Texas derives its name from its location on the bend of the Rio Grande. The river creates a natural border that separates the United States from Mexico.

#### Park Significance

The park is significant because it contains the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States. The park's river, desert, and mountain environments support an extraordinary richness of biological diversity, including endemic plants and animals, and provide unparalleled recreation opportunities. The geologic features and Cretaceous and Tertiary fossils in Big Bend National Park furnish opportunities to study the sedimentary and igneous processes. Archeological and historic resources provide examples of cultural interaction in the Big Bend Region and varied ways humans adapted to the desert and river environments. The Rio Grande is life-sustaining for plants, animals, and human inhabitants beyond its banks. Along with the two Mexican protected areas for flora and fauna, Maderas del Carmen and Cañon de Santa Elena, Big Bend is now part of one of the largest transboundary protected areas in North America. More than two million acres of Chihuahuan Desert resources, along with more than 200 miles of river, are now under the national protection of the United States and Mexico.

### Administration

#### Staffing

National Park Service:  
92 permanent  
36 seasonal

Big Bend Natural History Association  
3 permanent

Forever Resorts (concessionaire)  
60 permanent  
25 seasonal

#### Volunteers in Parks

322 volunteers contributed 48,634 hours of service

#### Student Conservation Association

8 SCAs contributed 3,938 hours of service

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## Natural Resources

### Size

801,163 acres (1,252 square miles)  
15<sup>th</sup> largest in the national park system

### Elevation

Highest point is Emory Peak, 7,832 ft.  
Lowest point is Rio Grande Village, 1,850 ft.

### River Canyons

Santa Elena Canyon	20 miles
Mariscal Canyon	10 miles
Boquillas Canyon	33 miles

### US/Mexico Border

Shared International Border—118 miles  
Mexican States Bordering the Park—2 States:  
Chihuahua & Coahuila

### Landmarks and Elevations

Emory Peak	7,832	ft.
South Rim	7,375	ft.
Casa Grande	7,325	ft.
Chisos Basin	5,400	ft.
Panther Junction	3,750	ft.
Castolon	2,169	ft.
Rio Grande Village	1,850	ft.

### Climate and Weather

Fall and spring are usually warm and pleasant. Summers are hot, although temperatures vary greatly between the desert floor and the Chisos Mountains; May and June are the hottest months. Afternoon and evening rains often cool the desert from July to October. Winters are generally mild, although periods of cold weather (including light snow) are possible.

### Flora and Fauna

1,200+ species of flora  
75 species mammals  
450+ species birds  
56 species reptiles  
11 species amphibians  
40 species fish

### Major Resource Issues:

Air Quality/Visibility  
Rio Grande Water Quality & Quantity  
Exotic Species  
Theft of Park Resources

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## Cultural Resources

### Human History

Evidence of nearly 9,000 years of human occupation by Paleo-Indian, archaic peoples and a variety of southwestern tribes, including the Chisos, Jumano, Mescalero Apache, and Comanche. Around 1870 ranchers began to migrate to the Big Bend, and by 1900 ranchers, miners and farmers occupied the area.

### Collection Summary

Archeological objects systematically recovered from within the park's boundaries and associated field records; historic objects related to the park's history; herbarium and associated field records; other biological specimens; geological and paleontological specimens.

### Cataloged Museum Objects

123,074

### Archeological Resources

Nearly 10,000 sites (3% of park surveyed to date)

### National Register of Historic Places

There are eight National Register of Historic Places sites or districts in Big Bend National Park. They are Burro Mesa Archeological District, Castolon Historic District, Hot Springs Historic District, the Mariscal Mining District, the Homer Wilson Blue Creek Ranch Site, Rancho Estelle, Daniel's Farmhouse and Luna's Jacal.

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## Visitor Services and Protection

### Visitation

400,947 (2005) All-time record visitation; previous record was 378,600 visitors in 1976.

### Frontcountry Camping

Chisos Basin Campground: 63 sites  
Cottonwood Campground: 31 sites  
Rio Grande Village Campground: 100 sites  
Rio Grande Village RV Park (hookups): 25 sites

### Picnic Areas

5 (Dugout Wells, Daniels Ranch, Castolon, Chisos Basin, Persimmon Gap)

### Backcountry Use (2005)

Backcountry Camp Sites : 116  
Overnight Backpacking Permits: 2,090  
Backcountry Roadside Permits: 3,148  
River Use Permits: 965

### Hiking trails

201 miles

### Roads:

304 total miles (Paved and gravel)  
123 miles of paved roads  
45 miles of improved unpaved roads  
136 miles of primitive unpaved roads

### Concessionaire

Foverever Resorts operates the Chisos Mountains Lodge (72 rooms in motel units and four historic cottages), camper stores at three locations and gas stations at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village.

### Visitor Protection (2005)

Search and Rescue: 11 incidents  
Motor Vehicle Accidents: 22  
Emergency Medical Incidents: 63  
Fatalities: 1

### Interpretation and Education (2005)

Programs: 628 programs presented to 11,486 visitors  
Educational programs presented to 347 students  
Junior Ranger Program: 1,175 participants

### Big Bend Natural History Association

A non-profit organization that supports education, research and other programs for the benefit of Big Bend. Financial aid is provided to the park through the sales of interpretive products. Outlets for these products are located in all park visitor centers.

### Friends of Big Bend National Park

A non-profit organization whose mission is to support, promote, and raise funds for Big Bend National Park in partnership with the National Park Service and other supporters who value the unique qualities of this national resource along the Rio Grande.